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ABSTRACT

A study compared the types of information included in English narratives written by monolingual American students, English narratives by bilingual Mexican students, and Spanish narratives by monolingual Mexican students, and possible differences by grade level. Subjects were in six groups: monolingual (English-speaking) American; bilingual Mexican; and monolingual (Spanish-speaking) Mexican, in fourth and ninth grades. Data were drawn from written narratives elicited with a silent animated film of an animal fable, a total of 10 stories in each of the 6 analysis groups. Results indicate that although general narrative structure did not differ for Mexicans and Americans, Mexicans provided more information about emotional states and personal traits. With respect to developmental differences, the younger writers tended to include fewer physical and action details, provide fewer causal links between actions and states, and provide significantly less information about characters' emotional states and physical and personal traits. Bilinguals also showed a developmental lag in the second language with respect to inclusion of information about setting and action details, and in proportion of propositions allocated to different parts of the story. No evidence of first-to-second-language transfer appeared. Contains 29 references. (MSE)

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ABSTRACT

The present study is a comparison of the types of information included in the English narratives written by monolingual American students, the English narratives written by bilingual Mexican students and the Spanish narratives written by monolingual Mexican students. The following three questions are addressed: (1) Do Mexican and American monolingual students include different information in their narratives? (2) Does grade influence the types of information students include in their narratives? and (3) Does students' bilingualism influence the types of information they include in their narratives, and if so, does this influence manifest itself in the form of transfer or of a developmental lag?

INTRODUCTION

The narrative provides an excellent genre for combining quantitative contrastive discourse analysis with the investigation of first and second language acquisition. It is a naturally bounded unit of discourse with a regular internal structure and is found in all cultures. Furthermore it is functionally quite important. Regardless of age, language or cultural background, people learn to interact with their environment by creating systematic representations of experience. One important

way by which they order experience is the construction of narratives. By sharing narratives people make their interpretation of events and ideas available to others, thus facilitating construction of a joint social reality.

The narrative has been extensively studied both developmentally as well as cross-culturally. Expanding on the work of Propp (1968), scholars have proffered a variety of different but overlapping models of narrative structure (Labov 1972; de Beaugrande and Colby 1979; van Dijk 1980; Stein and Trabasso 1982; Stein and Policastro 1984; Brewer 1985). The models of Labov, van Dijk and Stein and Trabasso have all had a wide currency. According to Labov a completely developed narrative consists of the following structural elements: **abstract**, which serves as a short summary of the story; **orientation**, which identifies the setting and characters in the story; **complicating action**, which details the sequence of events and action in the story; **evaluation**, which reveals the point of the story; **resolution**, which gives the end result of the actions or events; and **coda**, which signals completion of the story. Van Dijk's model includes the following hierarchically arranged elements: **setting**, **complication**, **resolution**, **evaluation**, and **coda** or **moral**. The minimal story in the model of Stein and Trabasso consists of a setting and an episode. The setting includes the introduction of the protagonist and one or more statements about the protagonist and the physical, social or temporal environment. The episode consists of a sequence of five different categories. The first category, the **initiating events** contains information marking a change in the protagonist's environment which evokes a desire to achieve some sort of goal. The second category, **internal response**, includes the goal and optionally an emotional response to the initiating event. The third category is the protagonist's **attempt** to achieve the goal. The fourth category, the **consequence**, indicates whether or not the goal was achieved and may give rise to a second episode. **Reaction**, the fifth category, may include the character's response to what has occurred, events which occur as a direct result of what has gone before, or a moral which indicates what can be learned from the character's action.

A number of researchers have used the models described above to examine narrative structure both cross-culturally and developmentally. Cross-cultural studies have delineated a series of differences with respect to the presence of specific story structure categories (e.g., Shimkin 1947; Jacobs 1959; Finnegan 1967; Labov 1972; Hunt 1976; Schöttelndreyer 1978), their order (e.g., Jacobs 1959; Labov 1972; Newman 1978; Toba 1978; Scollon and Scollon 1981), and the type and amount of information included in them, particularly with respect to physical description and character portrayal (e.g., Jacobs 1964; Finnegan 1967; Labov 1972; Tedlock 1972; and Tannen 1980).

Developmental studies (e.g., Botvin and Sutton-Smith 1977; Appleby 1978; King and Rentel 1981; Yussen 1982; and Haslett 1986) have found that structural complexity increases with age. Young children tell "skeletal" stories with little attention to character motivation, feelings or logical connectives. Older children include more elements related to setting, psychological states, and actions. Older children also more frequently include formal openings, closings and morals. There is also an indication that the order of narrative acquisition appears to parallel that of analogous linguistic structures, thus suggesting that both skills may rest on similar underlying cognitive structures.

Despite the fact that there are numerous cross-cultural and developmental studies of narratives, little has been published on child second language narratives.[1] The present study investigates this area. It is a comparison of the types of information included in the English narratives written by monolingual American students, the English narratives written by bilingual Mexican students and the Spanish narratives written by monolingual Mexican students. The following three questions are addressed: (1) Do Mexican and American monolingual students include different information in their narratives? (2) Does grade influence the types of information students include in their narratives? and (3) Does students' bilingualism influence the types of information they include in their narratives, and if so, does this influence manifest itself in the form of transfer or of a developmental lag?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects for this study were divided into six groups by the grade in which they were enrolled (fourth versus ninth) and their linguistic status (English monolingual versus Spanish monolingual versus Spanish-English bilingual). The monolingual English speakers were Americans attending school in the Midwest of the United States. Both the monolingual Spanish speakers and the Spanish-English bilinguals were Mexicans attending school in central Mexico. All of the students were from upper middle and upper class backgrounds and were enrolled in very well equipped urban private schools whose programs encompassed preschool through high school. The school in which the bilinguals were enrolled featured a bilingual program using English as the sole medium of instruction in preschool and first grade, then switching to half-day Spanish and half-day English instruction for the rest of elementary school and continuing with English for selected subjects through high school.

Data Collection

The data to be discussed here consist of English and Spanish written narratives elicited with a silent animated film of the animal fable genre. Its protagonist was a naughty owlet who liked to watch television and did not pay attention to his lessons and consequently had a frightening encounter with a fox. The film was silent in order to avoid influencing the subjects' language. It lasted slightly over four minutes. To facilitate observation and retention of the event sequence and descriptive details, the film was shown to the subjects twice. They were then asked to write the story they had seen as if they were writing an animal fable to be read by a child who had not seen the film. The task was administered in a sixty minute class period.

Data Analysis

The corpus of data used for this study consisted of 60 stories: ten English stories written by monolingual English speakers, ten English stories written by Spanish-English bilinguals and ten Spanish stories written by monolingual Spanish speakers at each of two grades - fourth and ninth. These stories were analyzed within a framework that combined aspects of the models for the analysis of narrative structure proposed by Labov 1972, Van Dijk 1980, and Stein and Trabasso 1982. A composite framework was derived in order to differentiate clearly all the structural categories found in the corpus while excluding categories that did not appear. This approach enabled us to highlight most efficiently significant differences among the narratives.

Our composite model divided the stories in terms of the following categories: the orientation or setting, six episodes, and the resolution. The orientation introduced the protagonists, a father and mother owl and their soon to hatch offspring, and provided information about the physical, social and temporal setting. The six episodes identified involved, in order of occurrence: (1) the hatching of the owlets, (2) the disappearance of the naughty owlet and his parents' search for him, (3) the owlets' flying lesson taught by the parents, (4) a day at school, (5) playing cowboy, and (6) the naughty owlet's encounter with a fox. These six episodes were separated cinematographically into six quite distinct scenes. The resolution included the rescue of the naughty owlet from the fox by his brothers and optionally a moral and/or a coda describing what happened to the protagonist(s) subsequently. For purposes of analysis we then counted the number of propositions devoted to each category in each story, normalizing these numbers by dividing by the total number of propositions in the story.[2]

Furthermore, since developmental studies have indicated that young children tell simpler stories than older ones (e.g., they include fewer details about characters and settings of actions and often omit the logical connections among actions) five additional analytic categories were included to assess the effect of age on the narratives. These analytic categories were causal links, details of setting and actions, physical descriptions of characters, descriptions of characters' personal traits and descriptions of characters' emotional states. Again, in the case of causal links, details of setting and action, and descriptions of characters' emotional states, the number of occurrences of items belonging to each category for each story was normalized by dividing by the total number of propositions in the story. In the case of physical descriptions and descriptions of personality, the number of types rather than the number of tokens was used so no normalization was done for these categories.

In order to address the three questions posed in this paper, the scores obtained for each category of analysis were submitted to analyses of variance with two between-subjects independent variables: grade and linguistic status. The variable grade had two levels: fourth and ninth. The variable linguistic status had three levels defined by a combination of the language of the story and the author's status as a bilingual or monolingual. Thus the three levels of the variable linguistic status were: English story written by a monolingual English speaker, English story written by a Spanish-English bilingual, and Spanish story written by a monolingual Spanish speaker.

TABLE 1
Results of the two-way ANOVA

	linguistic status		grade		ling stat x gr	
	SS	F	SS	F	SS	F
orientation	.012	3.862*	.000	.021	.000	.644
owlets' hatching	.016	2.719	.011	3.782#	.000	1.849
naughty owlet's disappearance	.003	.638	.005	1.236	.018	2.364
flying lesson	.035	4.378*	.000	.125	.002	.788
school	.032	1.969	.001	.151	.012	.740
playing cowboy	.004	.642	.004	1.164	.000	.015
encounter with a fox	.030	9.222***	.000	.000	.001	.263
resolution	.005	1.780	.002	1.409	.020	6.671**
causal links between episodes	.000	.366	.002	3.824##	.000	.282
setting and action details	.008	4.134*	.000	.482	.007	3.723*
characters' emotional states	.016	7.053**	.017	14.857***	.008	3.371*
characters' personal traits	20.033	6.629**	45.067	29.824***	35.233	11.658***
characters' physical traits	.900	.116	22.817	5.881*	3.633	.468

\# $p < .057$
$p < .056$

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 2
Means

	main effects					interaction					
	linguistic status			grade		fourth grade			ninth grade		
	Eng bil	Sp mono	Eng mono	4th	9th	Eng bil	Sp mono	Eng mono	Eng bil	Sp mono	Eng mono
orientation	.11	.08	.07	.09	.09	.10	.09	.07	.11	.07	.08
owlets' hatching	.12	.08	.10	.11	.08	.13	.09	.11	.10	.06	.08
naughty owlet's disappearance	.12	.13	.12	.13	.12	.15	.12	.13	.09	.15	.11
flying lesson	.07	.09	.13	.10	.10	.06	.10	.13	.08	.09	.14
school	.23	.28	.27	.25	.26	.24	.25	.27	.22	.30	.27
playing cowboy	.11	.13	.12	.11	.13	.11	.12	.11	.12	.14	.13
encounter with a fox	.16	.11	.11	.12	.12	.15	.11	.12	.16	.10	.11
resolution	.08	.10	.06	.08	.09	.06	.12	.07	.11	.08	.09
causal links between episodes	.03	.03	.03	.02	.04	.02	.02	.03	.04	.03	.03
setting and action details	.05	.08	.07	.06	.07	.04	.09	.06	.06	.06	.08
characters' emotional states	.03	.07	.05	.04	.07	.01	.04	.05	.05	.10	.06
characters' personal traits#	1.20	2.45	1.35	.77	2.50	.90	.50	.90	1.50	4.40	1.60
characters' physical traits#	2.55	2.70	2.40	1.93	3.17	1.90	2.40	1.50	3.20	3.00	3.30

All variables except characters' personal traits and characters' physical traits were normalized by dividing them by the total number of propositions in each story. Since characters' personal trait and characters' physical traits are types rather than tokens, they were not so normalized.

RESULTS

The results of the analyses are shown in tables 1 and 2. With respect to the story structure categories, there were main effects for linguistic status for the following three variables: orientation [$F(2,54)=3.862$, $p<.05$, x(SpMon)=.08, x(EngMon)=.07, x(EngBil)=.11], flying lesson [$F(2,54)=4.378$, $p<.05$, x(SpMon)=.09, x(EngMon)=.13, x(EngBil)=.07], and encounter with a fox [$F(2,54)=9.222$, $p<.001$, x(SpMon)=.11, x(EngMon)=.11, x(EngBil)=.16].

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A post hoc Newman-Keuls analysis indicated that the main effect for orientation sentences was due to the fact that there were proportionally more orientation propositions in the bilinguals' English stories than in either the Spanish monolinguals' or the English monolinguals' stories. The main effect for the flying episode was due to the fact that the English monolinguals devoted a significantly greater part of their stories to the flying lesson episode than did the bilinguals to theirs. Finally, the main effect for the fox episode was the result of the fact that the bilinguals devoted a significantly greater portion of their stories to this episode than did either of the monolingual groups.

No main effect for grade occurred for any of the story structure categories. However, the main effect for grade approached significance for the hatching episode [$F(2,56)=3.782$, $p<.057$]. Fourth graders devoted a larger proportion of their stories to this episode than did ninth graders.

One significant interaction of linguistic status and grade occurred for the story structure categories. It involved the resolution category [$F(2,56)=6.671$, $p<.01$], and it resulted from the fact that while for monolinguals' and bilinguals' English stories the proportion of the story devoted to the resolution increased greatly across grades, this proportion decreased across grades for the Spanish monolinguals' stories. One-way ANOVAs indicated that this interaction resulted from the fact that while at fourth grade, Spanish monolinguals devoted a significantly greater portion of their stories to the resolution than did monolingual English speakers or bilinguals writing in English; there were no significant differences between the groups at grade nine.

Turning now to an analysis of the results for the other categories, we find that there were main effects for linguistic status for three of them: setting and action details [$F(2,54)=4.134$, $p<.05$, $x(SpMon)=.08$, $x(EngMon)=.07$, $x(EngBil)=.05$], descriptions of characters' emotional states [$F(2,54)=7.053$, $p<.01$, $x(SpMon)=.07$, $x(EngMon)=.05$, $x(EngBil)=.03$], and descriptions of characters' personality traits [$F(2,54)=6.629$, $p<.01$, $x(SpMon)=2.45$, $x(EngMon)=1.25$, $x(EngBil)=1.20$]. A post hoc Newman-Keuls analysis indicated that the main effect for setting and action details was due to the fact that the English stories of bilinguals contained a significantly lower proportion of detailed information than did either the stories written by monolingual English speakers or monolingual Spanish speakers. The main effect for emotional states resulted from the fact that bilinguals' English stories contained a significantly lower proportion of descriptions of emotional states than did the Spanish stories of monolinguals. Finally, the main effect for personality traits reflected the fact that the stories of Spanish monolinguals contained more details about the characters' personal traits than did the stories of English monolinguals.

The variable grade produced significant main effects for the three categories pertaining to the protagonists: emotional states [$F(1,54)=14.857$, $p<.001$, $x(4th)=.04$, $x(9th)=.07$], personal traits [$F(1,54)=29.824$, $p<.001$, $x(4th)=.77$, $x(9th)=2.50$], and physical traits [$F(1,54)=5.881$, $p<.05$, $x(4th)=1.93$, $x(9th)=3.17$].

There was also an almost significant effect for causal links [$F(1,54)=3.824$, $p<.056$, $x(4th)=.02$, $x(9th)=.04$]. In each case the effect was due to greater use of propositions of these types by ninth graders than by fourth graders.

Significant interactions of linguistic status by grade occurred for three variables: setting and action details [$F(2,54)=3.723$, $p<.05$], emotional states of characters [$F(2,54)=3.371$, $p<.05$], and personal traits of characters [$F(2,54)=11.658$, $p<.001$].

One-way ANOVAs were performed to examine these interactions. They revealed that the interaction for setting and action details resulted from the fact that at fourth grade Spanish monolinguals provided proportionately more detail than did either English monolinguals or Spanish-English bilinguals, while at ninth grade there was no difference among the groups. The interaction for emotional states reflected the fact that from fourth to ninth grade both Spanish monolinguals and Spanish-English bilinguals increased the extent to which they supplied information about emotional states, whereas the English monolinguals did not. Thus at fourth grade the bilinguals provided significantly less information than either group of monolinguals, and there was no significant difference between the two monolingual groups. However at ninth grade, the bilinguals increased their use to match that of the monolingual English speakers while the use of monolingual Spanish speakers also increased so that it was now significantly greater than that of both other groups. The interaction for personal traits was due to the fact that at fourth grade there was no significant difference among the groups while at ninth grade the monolingual Spanish speakers included significantly more information about personal traits than did members of the other two groups.

DISCUSSION

The first question posed in this paper was: Do Mexican and American monolingual students include different information in their narratives? With respect to the percentage of propositions devoted to each story structure category (the orientation, six episodes, and the resolution), the answer is "very little." The only significant difference in the proportions of their narratives that the Spanish monolinguals and English monolinguals devoted to the different parts of the story

involved the resolution at fourth grade, where Spanish monolinguals provided more information than did English monolinguals. However with respect to some of the other categories of analysis, the answer is "yes." The stories of the Spanish monolinguals contained more details about the characters' personal traits than did the stories of the English monolinguals. Furthermore across the Spanish monolingual subjects, there was more variability in the details given about the owls than there was across the English monolinguals. The English monolinguals described the owls as naughty, adorable, sweet, bad, mischievous, courageous, and rascals. The Spanish monolinguals described them as *distraido* (distracted), *violento* (violent), *travieso* (naughty), *inquieto* (restless), *perezoso* and *flojo* (lazy), *tonto* (dumb), *inocente* (innocent), *bueno* (good), *ordenado* (well-behaved), *chillón* (noisy), *latoso* (annoying), *un burro* (a donkey), *simpático* (likable), *estudioso* (studious), *indefenso* (defenseless) and *irresponsable* (irresponsible). Interestingly, in describing the fox several Spanish monolinguals used the word *astuto* (clever), but no English monolinguals used its equivalent, despite the fact that the image of the wily fox is part of American folklore as well.

Additionally, we find that both Spanish monolinguals and Spanish-English bilinguals increased their descriptions of emotional states from fourth to ninth grades while English monolinguals did not. At ninth grade the Spanish monolinguals gave significantly more information about emotional states than did English monolinguals.

Finally, at fourth grade but not at ninth grade, Spanish monolinguals provided significantly more setting and action details than did English monolinguals.

The earlier attention to setting and action details of Spanish monolinguals is hard to explain without a detailed knowledge of the curricula of the schools which the two monolingual groups attended. However, the fact that Spanish monolinguals provided more information about emotional states and personal traits than did English monolinguals probably reflects the cultural differences between Americans and Mexicans described by such authors as Octavio Paz and Alan Riding. Both Paz and Riding describe Mexicans as being more concerned with psychological attributes, emotions, and subjective reality than with pragmatic outcomes or objective reality. In *El laberinto de la soledad* (1959), Paz compares the Mexican and North American character, asserting:

> *Los norteamericanos quieren comprender; nosotros contemplar. Son activos, nosotros quietistas: disfrutamos de nuestras llagas como ellos de sus inventos (p. 22).*
>
> The North Americans want to understand; we to contemplate. They are activists, we quietists: we enjoy our torments as they their inventions.]

In **Vecinos Distantes** (1985), Riding offers a similar characterization of the Mexican:

> *Más bien interpreta el mundo de acuerdo con sus emociones.... El contraste más extraño de todos pudiera estar en el ritual y el desorden que parecen coexistir dentro del mexicano, aunque ello ilustra también el predominio de lo espiritual sobre lo material. La preocupación por el aspecto emocional y el espiritual de la vida es visible...*
> *(p. 15).*
>
> [Rather he interprets the world in accordance with his emotions.... The strangest contrast of all may be in the ritual and the disorder which appear to coexist in the Mexican, although that also illustrates the predominance of the spiritual over the material. The preoccupation with the emotional and spiritual aspect of life is visible...]

The second question posed in this paper was: Does grade influence the types of information students include in their narratives? With respect to the story structure categories, it would appear that the answer is "no" or "very little." There was no significant grade effect for any of the story structure categories and only one effect, that for the hatching episode, approached significance. Fourth graders tended to devote proportionately more of their story to the first episode than did ninth graders. This may simply reflect a tendency on the part of the fourth graders to have more difficulty handling time constraints on a task. They may well have devoted more time to a description of the first episode than ninth graders and later needed to hurry to complete the task.

While little of interest with respect to grade differences is apparent for the story structure categories, there were notable age differences with respect to the description of protagonists. Fourth graders provided less description of the emotional states of the protagonists, their personal traits and their physical traits than did ninth graders. Additionally, more variability was seen in the descriptors used by ninth graders than by fourth graders. For example, monolingual Spanish fourth graders used only three different adjectives to describe the owlets, *distraído* (distracted), *violento* (violent), and *travieso* (naughty) while monolingual Spanish ninth graders used seventeen. In addition, there was a tendency for fourth graders to provide fewer causal links between actions and states than did ninth graders (the significance level for this effect was $p < .056$).

The third and final question posed in this paper was: Does students' bilingualism influence the types of information they include in their narratives and if so, does this influence manifest itself in the form of transfer or a developmental

lag? The bilinguals devoted proportionally more of their stories to the orientation and the fox episode than did either of the monolingual groups. Perhaps these facts reflected limitations on the bilinguals' ability to handle the task due to incomplete mastery of English, their second language. At the fourth grade, the bilinguals' stories evinced serious grammatical errors and at ninth grade a few students still made a number of syntactic errors. Additionally bilinguals tended to write shorter stories than did monolinguals [$F(1,54)=3.114$, $p<.052$, $x(\text{EngBil})=42.6$, $x(\text{SpMono})=52.5$ and $x(\text{EngMono})=51.1$]. It may be the case that, hampered by limited linguistic skills, the bilinguals had difficulty allocating time to the writing of different sections of the story. In that case, they may have taken more time than desirable at the beginning of the task, that is, in writing the orientation. Later, with inadequate time to develop all sections of the story, they may have chosen the fox episode to elaborate as the most important since the events which take place in it are the culmination of what has gone before.

A developmental lag is more clearly indicated by the fact that bilinguals included significantly fewer setting and action details than did either Spanish or English monolinguals. Both developmental lag and accommodation to L_2 norms may be involved in the fact that bilinguals included significantly less information about emotional states than did Spanish monolinguals. We find that at fourth grade, English monolinguals also included significantly more information about emotional states than did bilinguals, but at ninth grade there was no significant difference between English monolinguals and bilinguals. However at ninth grade there was a significant difference between English and Spanish monolinguals where Spanish monolinguals provided more information. It would appear then that at fourth grade, bilinguals were showing a clear lag, but at ninth grade, they were equivalent to English monolinguals. There are two possible explanations for the fact that the bilingual ninth graders provided less information about emotional states than Spanish monolingual ninth graders. One possibility is accommodation to the English norm. The other is a continued developmental lag--that is, the bilingual students might have preferred to provide more information about emotional states than the English monolinguals, but might still have been unable to do so as a result of inadequate vocabulary or insufficient time.

CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed three issues: cultural differences in narratives, developmental differences in narratives, and the effect of bilingualism on narratives. The findings indicate that although general narrative structure did not differ for Mexicans and Americans, Mexicans provided more information about emotional states and personal traits. With respect to developmental differences, we have found, as have previous authors, that younger writers tended both to include fewer physical and action details than did older writers and to provide fewer causal links between actions and states. They also provided significantly less information about the emotional states of characters and about their physical and personal traits. We have also found evidence that bilinguals did indeed show a developmental lag in their second language with respect to inclusion of information about setting and action details and perhaps also in proportion of propositions allocated to different parts of the story. At fourth grade the bilinguals also appear to have displayed a developmental lag with respect to inclusion of information about emotional states. Finally, no evidence of L_1 transfer to L_2 was found, but there is some evidence that at ninth grade bilinguals followed L_2 rather than L_1 patterns in the L_2 with respect to inclusion of information about emotional states. The data here, however, are inconclusive. The relative lack of information might have been due to accommodation to the L_2, but it might also have been due to a developmental lag which prevented the students from expressing themselves fully despite their extensive familiarity with the second language.

THE AUTHORS

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NOTES

[1] However, see for example McClure and Wentz 1976; McClure and Blomeyer 1984; and Edelsky 1986.

[2] Since the stories from the three linguistic groups were scored by three different raters, interrater reliability was examined. Each of the three raters analyzed the same six stories, one fourth and one ninth grade story from each linguistic group. These stories were drawn from the total corpus of sixty stories used for the study. For each pair of raters, both percentage agreement and Kappa (K) indices were calculated (K is a conservative measure which adjusts for agreements which are expected due to chance, see Wickens 1989 pp. 238-243). Agreement between raters 1 and 2 was 93% (K=.76), between raters 1 and 3 95% (K=.83), and between raters 2 and 3, 94% (K=.82).

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